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EDU 402

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Background Statement

1. **What were the expectations of the educational systems for the students?** In my schools, students were expected to be attentive. There was a lot of lecture time and a lot of directions to follow. School was our job and taking it seriously was important. Many times there was little opportunity to joke around or feel like you had a said. Respect was one of the most common traits that teachers said they valued.
2. **What were the expectations of your parent(s)/guardian(s) for your education?** When I was young, I thought my parents expected a lot of me, especially since my older sister was a stellar student. There were never penalties or rewards for my grades, but they were always interested in how I was doing, often helping with things I didn’t quite understand. As I got older, probably middle school, I realized that my parents had diminished their involvement because they trusted I would continue to do well. There were very few times we had discussions about my ability to do better, and even when they did, they supported my decisions. For example, junior year, I decided not to do a major assignment because I couldn’t see the relevance and I had too many other things going on. My mother didn’t like it, but she didn’t argue when I explained I had other priorities.
3. **What were the expectations of the business world on education?** It seemed that the business world expected schools to be readying students to excel in all fields, but with the limited resources they already had. When I was younger, we often had major changes in the curriculum based on what statistics told us we needed to change. Many times it was conveyed that we were behind other nations in their expectations for school. As a high school student, it seemed like things were shifting more towards on the business world wanting schools to foster our unique characteristics. All too often I felt like education was only recognized as valuable if they were doing something different and seeing positive results. This is what got public interest, funding and resources.
4. **What were your expectations for your own education? How were the classes physically set up?** I had extremely high expectations for myself, especially with an older sister doing so well. I never wanted to do better than her, I always wanted to be just as good. There were some things I enjoyed more than she did, like reading, and it didn’t take long for me to be recognized as a good reader. After years of thinking that life revolved around academics, I began to see the importance in learning outside the classroom. I got involved in school with new people working on new things, took leadership roles and starting working with the community. Classrooms in elementary school were almost always set up in rows, with no desks touching, all facing the board. Middle school focused on us sitting in groups, usually four desks facing each other, because so much of our work required interaction. In high school, we’d move them depending on our purpose, but it went back to rows. This time, desks were more likely to be touching, however.
5. **What types of strategies did the teachers use when teaching?** Often teachers would allow for quite reflections and preliminary writing before asking us to contribute. It wasn’t until I got to high school that things became more spontaneous and less rigid and traditional. Lectures were common, although math and social studies were more likely to require note taking. Science always focused on learning vocabulary first, which didn’t give us as much time to dive in and play with things. English was almost always the most interactive, and a lot of the time teachers would involve students in helping fill class time by reading aloud or allowing them to work on their projects in class.
6. **What strategies did and did not meet your needs and why? In what setting did you have joy for learning and describe a most memorable teacher that had major influence on your learning?** I needed very little guidance. Often times if you gave me the materials and instructions, I could figure things out by myself. Occasionally it was helpful to have someone to confer with, but more often than not working in groups annoyed me. I didn’t need hands on projects, but I liked when we created something, like art. I think I would have benefitted from having more connections between classrooms. One of the most successful parts of learning I had was when I took physics and calculus at the same time. I was able to connect the math to real world examples and both made much more sense. I always loved school, but my seventh grade English teacher was different. She was younger and seemed more in tune with what seventh grade was really like. She started forcing us to go deeper into texts, spending several weeks on one book. She also had us reading lots on our own time, and along with this had us keep a journal of responses to our books. She would read them every week and replying, adding anecdotes and suggesting our next books. It was nice to have a teacher be relatable, but to also have high expectations. She worked with us to push our learning to the next level, and it felt very individualized.
7. **What do you remember about the socioeconomic level(s) and ethnic diversity of the student body?** Our student body was full of working class families, and those in middle class stuck out as the upper crust. Ethnic differences in our school were at an extreme minimum. We probably only had three or four families that weren’t White Americans, and if they weren’t white, they still had a long line of American heritage for the most part.
8. **How were the programs and classes structured and what were your thoughts and responses to it?** We had tracking in our schools, starting in first grade. They often made it very challenging to break out of your track, and many students weren’t interested in changing into an uncomfortable setting. Emphasis was put on Science and English, and newer resources often went to them. Electives were very few and far between, and weren’t taken seriously. Extracirricular activities seemed to be more important to families. Most were lecture and book based, and often being in a higher track meant more reading and more independence.
9. **What types of classes did you take and how do you feel about the education you received?** I took all honors classes until my senior year when, to the frustration of my guidance counselor, I took our average level physics class. I wanted to not only interact with other people, but get more hands on time, which was out of my comfort zone. I feel like a lot of the success I had in my education was based on my limited needs as a student. I was able to sit still for long periods and listen attentively. I could be handed a textbook, read the chapter, and understand the concepts completely. Independent work always went better for me and that was the type of education I had. I thrived because I had the right tools, not because I was particularly intelligent. My mother and I used to joke that I was good at ‘playing the game of school.’
10. **How do you think your background will affect how you will approach teaching as a professional career?** I think that coming from an education that relied heavily upon good listeners and limited interactions, I would like to approach my students as people who also have things to share. I think that independent work is great, so long as the independence is led by the student, not expected of them. Each subject, though unique, have extreme cross overs, and what student doesn’t benefit from reinforcement of ideas? I believe that an interdisciplinary approach is what builds strong and lasting foundations of learning. I also think that every student needs to explore new ways of learning, either through hands on application, digital interaction, group efforts and so on. Getting out of your comfort zone helps you grow as a learner, and gives you new tools you might need later.
11. **Why have you selected teaching as a profession?** I’ve been helping my peers with their work since I was in second grade. I love being a facilitator in helping someone see the world in a new way, or finally understand something they didn’t before. I want to be connected to the youth of this country, because they will have the opportunity to do great things if they are taught well. I believe that I have the ability to help get people where they want to go, and teaching is a gateway for that.
12. **What do you see as the characteristics of a superior teacher? How do you see implementing those traits into your classroom?** I think in any situation having a good attitude is important. A good attitude, not necessarily a positive one, can allow me to be adaptable and receptive to the needs of my students. It will keep the atmosphere of my classroom warm and inviting and model good attributes for my students. Even in bad situations, taking a moment to appreciate what is right in front of you can help. Attitude is what keeps you encouraging your student and not letting too much of the negative get in the way of being productive.
13. **What do you hope to gain by being a teacher and why**? I think through teaching I will gain the ability to understand the world better, because I will be constantly trying to help others do the same.In understanding more about the world I will become more receptive to the good things about it, and more aware of how to change the things I don’t believe are working well. In other words, I think it is the best way to be a life-long learner and to continue to participate as an acting member of a community and the world.
14. **What do you hope to contribute to the profession?** I’d really like to make a push for more interdisciplinary learning, with a focus on relevance and relation to tools students need in life. I’d like to do this without blurring the importance of each subject as an individual, and to allow students to find connections to all subjects, but in their own way.
15. **What fears, concerns, and questions do you have about the profession?** There are a lot of things that I’m concerned about. I think we’re headed toward a major shift in the way we teach and I don’t think the community will be as receptive. Change can be scary. I also think that the needs of students are changing, and that I might not be well qualified to help meet those needs. More than anything, I fear that education will become even less important to the public than it is today. Our world is shifting to highlight the individual, the unique qualities that make a person, and with a view that monotony is the norm, I fear that education will soon be disregarded as unhelpful and a waste of this fast moving culture’s time.